

ACT FIRST

THE EVENING OF THE PHEASANT-HEN

A farmyard such as the sounds from behind the curtain have described. At the right, a house over-clambered with wistaria. At the left, the farmyard gate, letting on to the road. A dog-kennel. At the back, a low wall, beyond which distant country landscape. The details of the setting define themselves in the course of the act.

CHANTECLER

PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

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2006

TRANSLATED

BY

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

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|------------------|-----------------------|
| CHANTECLER ✓ | THE WOOD-PECKER |
| PATOU ✓ | THE TURKEY |
| THE BLACKBIRD ✓ | THE DUCK |
| THE PEACOCK ✓ | THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK |
| THE NIGHTINGALE | THE PHEASANT-HEN ✓ |
| THE GRAND-DUKE ✓ | THE GUINEA-HEN ✓ |
| THE SCREECH-OWL | THE OLD HEN ✓ |
| LITTLE SCOPS | THE WHITE HEN |
| THE GAME-COCK | THE GREY HEN |
| THE HUNTING DOG | THE BLACK HEN |
| A CARRIER-PIGEON | THE SPECKLED HEN |
| THE TUFTED HEN | |

A Gander. A Capon. Chickens. Chicks. A Cock-
erel. A Swan. A Cuckoo. Night-birds. Fancy Cocks.
Toads. A Turkey-hen. A Goose. A Garden Warbler.
A Woodland Warbler. A Spider. A Heron. A Pigeon.
A Guinea-pig. Barnyard animals. Woodland Crea-
tures. Rabbits. Birds. Bees. Cicadas. Voices.

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PROLOGUE

The customary three knocks are heard. The drop-curtain wavers and is rising, when a voice rings out, "Not yet!" and the MANAGER, a gentleman of important mien in evening dress, springing from his proscenium box, hurries toward the stage, repeating, "Not yet!"

The curtain is again lowered. The MANAGER turns toward the audience, and resting one hand on the prompter's box, addresses them:

The curtain is a wall,—a flying wall. Assured that presently the wall will fly—why haste? Is it not charming to delay—and just look at it for a while?

Charming to sit before a great red wall, hanging beneath two gilt masks and a scroll—The thrilling moment is when the curtain thrills, and sounds come from the other side.

You are desired to-night to listen to those sounds and entering the scene before you see it, to wonder and surmise—

Bending his ear, the MANAGER listens to the sounds now beginning to come from behind the curtain.

A footstep—is it a road? A flutter of wings—is it a garden?

The curtain here rippling as if about to rise, the MANAGER precipitately shouts, "Stop!—Do not raise it yet!" Then again bending his ear, continues making note of the noises, clear or confused, single or combined, that from this onward come without stop from behind the curtain.

A magpie cawing flies away. Great wooden shoes come running over flags. A courtyard, is it? — If so above a valley — from whence that softened clamour of birds and barking dogs.

More and more clearly the scene suggests itself — Magically sound creates an atmosphere! — A sheep bell tinkles intermittently — Since there is grazing, we may look for grass.

A tree, too — a tree must rustle in the breeze, for a bullfinch warbles his little native song; and a black-bird whistling the song he has caught by ear, implies, we may presume, a wicker cage.

The rattling of a waggon run out of a shed — the dripping of a bucket drawn up overfull — the patter of doves' feet alighting on a roof — Surely it is a farmyard — unless it be a mill!

Rustling of straw, click of a wooden latch — A stable or a haymow there must be. The locust shrills: the weather then is fine. — Church-bells ring: it is Sunday then. — Chatter of jays: the woods cannot be far!

Hark! Nature with the scattered voices of a fair midsummer day is composing — in a dream! — the most mysterious of overtures — harmonised by evening, distance and the wind!

And all these sounds — song of a passing girl — laughter of children jogged by the donkey trotting — faraway gun-reports and hunting-horns — these sounds describe a holiday.

A window opens, a door closes — The harness shakes its bells. Is it not plain in sight, the old farmyard? — The dog sleeps, the cat but feigns to sleep.

Sunday! — Farmer and farmer's wife are starting for the fair. The old horse paws the ground —

A ROUGH VOICE

[*Behind the curtain, through the horse's pawing.*] Whoa, Dapple!

ANOTHER VOICE

[*As if calling to a laggard.*] Come along! We shan't get home till morning!

AN IMPATIENT VOICE

Are you ready?

ANOTHER VOICE

Fasten the shutters!

MAN'S VOICE

All right!

WOMAN'S VOICE

My sunshade!

MAN'S VOICE

[*Through the cracking of the whip.*] Gee up!

THE MANAGER

The waggon to the jingling of the harness rattles off, jolting out ditties. A turn in the road cuts off the unfinished song. — They are gone, quite gone. The performance can begin.

Some philosophers would say there was not a soul left, but we humbly believe that there are hearts. Man in leaving does not take with him all drama. One can laugh and suffer without him. [*He listens again.*]

Ardently humming, a velvety bumblebee hovers — then is still; he has plunged into a flower — Let us begin. Pray note that Æsop's hump to-night does duty as prompter's box!

The members of our company are small, but — [Calling toward the flies.] Alexander! [To the audience.] He is my chief machinist. [Calling again.] Let it down!

A VOICE

[From the flies.] It's coming, sir!

MANAGER

We have lowered between the audience and the stage an invisible screen of magnifying glass —

But there the violins are tuning up: Scraping of crystal bows, picking of strings! — Hush! Let the footlights now leap into brightness, for at a signal from their little leader the crickets' orchestra have briskly fallen to!

Frrrt! The bumblebee emerges from the flower, shaking the yellow dust — A Hen comes on the scene as in La Fontaine's fable. A Cuckoo calls, as in Beethoven's symphony.

Hush! Let the chandelier draw in its myriad lights — for the curious call-boy of the woods has, airily, to summon us, repeated thrice his double call —

And since Nature is one of our performers, and feathered notables are on our staff — Hush! the curtain must go up: A wood-pecker's bill has rapped out the three strokes!

ACT I
